

# STRONGER TOGETHER

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A BRIEFING OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM  
THE 2020 HBCU ACTION NATION TOWN HALL



*A Breath of Freedom, Jonathan Green, 2015, Acrylic on archival mat board, 10 ½ X 14", Courtesy of the U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina*



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# **WELCOME FROM THE ONLINE LEARNING CONSORTIUM**



**Dr. Kim Cliett Long**  
*Online Learning Consortium, Board of Directors*

Two people came together in mid-March 2020, to discuss the unfolding pandemic and how the sudden closures might impact the nation's historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The initial conversation was held between Dr. Robbie Melton and myself. From there, we decided to invite Drs. Reggie Smith and Arlethia McSwain. This became the core planning group with support from many others, including Dr. Glenda Glover, President of Tennessee State University and Mrs. Virginia Harris, National President, National Coalition of 100 Black Women. The planning group initially decided to organize a half-day virtual conference that evolved into two full days of keynote addresses and panels discussing vital topics pertaining to the sustainability and viability of HBCUs.

Many HBCUs were struggling to pivot suddenly to fully remote and online operations especially when most had been operating in traditional, face-to-face modes, we rallied to search for resources to support these efforts. Dr. Melton worked tirelessly to expand her work with HBCUs and Apple. As a board member of the Online Learning Consortium, I knew that OLC had training resources and information that could be helpful to the institutions. In fact, at the initiative of Dr. Jennifer Mathes, OLC's Chief Executive Officer, and Ms. Angela Gunder, OLC's Chief Academic, the organization was able to obtain an emergency grant from the Sloan Foundation to be able to offer specialized training to HBCUs and other minority serving institutions to enable them to quickly adapt to teaching and learning online. By collaborating in this HBCU virtual conference with the United States Distance Learning Association, we were able to centralize the information HBCUs were seeking.

Barbara Dunn Harrington, Principal of Dunn, LLC and Former Executive Director of the Tom Joyner Foundation, paints the picture of the event as follows:

*"The HBCU Action Network Town Hall in May 2020 symbolized my ability and commitment along with all participants to move into the support space of our institutions. A sharing of creative, scientific, and financial knowledge has presented opportunities to elevate higher education to its highest plateau. COVID-19 at that time was only two months into its storm and with continuous action from the best and brightest, HBCUs will be able to stay the course."*



This white paper is a result of these collaborative efforts and the important themes which emanated from the conversations held May 13-14, 2020. It was important to codify this information as the mission of HBCUs has become more exigent in these challenging times. The conversation continues!



**Dr. Jennifer Mathes**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Beginning in early 2020, the education world experienced many changes that forced us as administrators, faculty and students to adapt and rethink how we connect and learn. This was not always easy and in many cases actually highlighted the inequities that exist in our education system. In fact, the pandemic that forced colleges to social distance and move to remote learning exacerbated the struggles many HBCUs have faced in trying to meet the broad needs of their students.

However, these challenges also brought an opportunity for leaders in education, business, government and other organizations to come together and engage in meaningful discourse to strengthen the future for their learners. This white paper elevates many of those voices heard during the HBCU Action Nation Town Hall in an effort to capture these discussions. It provides critical insight into the contributions of HBCUs now and their potential for the future.

OLC has always maintained a strong focus and belief that online learning can serve as a conduit to provide quality learning experiences for all students. The experiences shared at the HBCU Action Nation Town Hall and in this report provide very real actions that can serve to direct and address the inequities within higher education.



**Ms. Angela Gunder**  
**Chief Academic Officer**

After many years of service as a volunteer of the Online Learning Consortium, I joined the organization as the VP of Learning in January 2020 with the duty of contributing to the advancement of quality in online, blended and digital learning amongst educators across the country. This work was closely aligned to the OLC's formation in 1992 when the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation established the non-profit as a means of "reaching and engaging the modern learner—anyone, anywhere, anytime"<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 brought this mission to the forefront in momentous and grave ways, calling leaders, educators, advocates, and students to converge in the reimaging of educational access amidst pandemic closures, social distancing, and mass migration into the digital learning environment.

1. <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/about/mission-vision/>

As my colleagues and I rallied together in support of continuity of instruction rooted in quality and inclusion, we knew two critical truths - 1) that the challenges caused by the pandemic were not new to all students but rather the aggravation of endemic inequities in education; and 2) that these inequities have historically disproportionately impacted Black students through deficit-centered educational practices, systemic racism, and a dearth of resources to support student access and success for all learners. This double bind has left countless Black students with no recourse for their extant struggles that were only amplified by the pandemic.

When Dr. Kim Cliett Long, a member of the OLC Board, approached OLC's CEO, Dr. Jennifer Mathes, and I with news of the HBCU Action Network Town Hall, it was clear that the event would redefine the path to centering student care for the HBCU community in our new pandemic reality. The thought leaders assembled would create a transformative call to action that would assert the collective demand that all students be provided with the necessary tools to succeed, and not just a privileged few. In support of the momentous convening, and the many who labored to bring it to life (including Drs. Arletha McSwain and Dr. Reggie Smith, III of USDLA, and former OLC Board Member and longtime personal mentor, Dr. Robbie Melton), OLC was humbled to lead the coordination of this white paper, "Stronger Together," to amplify the voices of the leaders of the HBCU community engaged in pivotal dialogue on the equitable, inclusive, and sustained support of students at our Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Indeed, the findings from that event as featured in this report will serve as transformative to the entire field, with HBCUs leading us to a brighter future of education through the critical analysis of the barriers in front of us. I am buoyed by the generous contributions of the visionaries and advocates assembled here in this work, particularly for their courage in addressing ubiquitous challenges within our teaching and learning environments. As James Baldwin once wrote, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

# **WELCOME FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION**



**Dr. Reggie Smith, III**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

On behalf of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of our partners that made last year's first of its kind Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Action Nation's Virtual Town Hall a huge success. Other event co-hosts included Dr. Glenda Glover, President, Tennessee State University; Dr. Robbie Melton, HBCU C2; Dr. Kim Long, Board and External Affairs Committee Member, Online Learning Consortium (OLC); Mrs. Virginia Harris, National President, National Coalition of 100 Black Women; and Dr. Arletha McSwain, Chair, USDLA Certification Committee, President Elect-USDLA and formerly Bethune Cookman University. Without their unwavering support and network of HBCUs, this two day event would not have been pulled off in record time.

HBCUs have been the cornerstone of education for the African-American community for more than 150 years. These institutions have prepared graduates to compete with the best and brightest minds globally, and I, as a graduate of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, I stand as a testament to their transformative power. In addition, distance learning has existed for more than 120 years, with the origins of distance learning within the HBCU community being traced back to the Black College Satellite Network (BCSN), founded in 1981 by Dr. Mabel P. Phifer and Dr. Walter C. Barwick. Even though the network is no longer around today, it set the stage for HBCUs to provide distance learning globally. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic forced all of us and especially HBCUs to double down on distance learning holistically and strategically.

COVID-19 was the forcing factor to hold such an historic virtual town hall for HBCUs. The pandemic has impacted nearly every country around the world with millions of cases confirmed and over three million deaths with over 500,000 of those deaths taking place here in the United States. In addition, countries around the world including the United States have either shut down or are beginning to re-open with some level of uncertainty due to an anticipated resurgence of COVID-19 in conjunction with the deployment of vaccines. No one knows for sure how long this pandemic will last, and it put distance learning in the spotlight on a global scale.

Most HBCUs did not have the structure in place to immediately implement a fully online learning environment. The past year or so has been a learning experience for university administrators, faculty, staff, and students with the convening of the HBCU Action Nation's Virtual Town Hall to provide valuable information, along with potential solutions. Expert panels spoke on a variety of topics key to the overall strategic needs and urgencies of HBCUs now and moving forward.

Flash back in time to 2007, the APLU-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning surveyed 42 National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)-member college presidents and chancellors. Of the respondents, slightly more than 84 percent said online education was critical to their long-term strategy. Almost 71 percent saw it as a way to attract students from outside the traditional service area, and almost 64 percent tied it to increasing student access. Nearly 78 percent of the respondents believed that students need more discipline to succeed in online courses, 70 percent saw higher costs to develop classes online and almost 60 percent found a lack of acceptance of online instruction by faculty.

Fast forward to 2020, COVID-19 brought all of this into focus for everyone, flipped those previously mentioned data points on its head for HBCUs. Distance learning includes e-learning, texting, social networking, virtual worlds, game-based learning, webinars. It's the Internet. It's Google. It's broadband and satellite and cable and wireless. Corporate universities. Virtual universities. Blended learning, mobile learning. It's using our phones and computers and whatever technology comes next, in new ways.

For the next five years, higher education will need to focus on a blending approach that will enable the industry to provide a quality education either in person or via distance learning. Ten years from now, we will see a much different job market, possibly accelerated by the pandemic to focus on smaller / micro stackable credentials. The currently unemployed / underemployed will consider career changes, and higher education will need to accommodate that now and into the future, which will be critical for HBCUs.

Please enjoy this "Stronger Together," report with recommendations and continue to engage with all of our organizations to leverage lessons learned and scale to deliver the rigorous learning environments that HBCUs are known for, whether via "brick and mortar" or "virtual" avenues. These are the HBCUs that created legendary giants like Langston Hughes, Oprah Winfrey, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and, of course, me.



**Dr. Arletha McSwain**  
***USDLA President Elect and Credentialing Committee Chair***

As USDLA President Elect and Credentialing Committee Chair, I was honored to serve as a member of the steering committee for the HBCU Action Nation Virtual Town Hall last May 14-15, 2020. The event was historic in that it was the first multi-day virtual Town Hall ever held that was focused solely on historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The Town Hall signified a clarion call to action to devise an actionable plan to assist the nation's HBCUs with the challenges faced as a direct result of the global pandemic and a long-term sustainability discussion. We considered solutions around various themes affecting the HBCU enterprise. This white paper is a codification and aerial view of the discussions that took place. I am very proud that the United States Distance Learning Association was a leading partner in this effort.

# **WELCOME FROM TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY (TSU)**



**President Glenda Baskin Glover**  
*Tennessee State University*

The virtual Town Hall was a call to action from among a comprehensive group of interested parties, national and local organizations, and influencers. Tennessee State University was proud to help co-host the virtual Town Hall in calling together our historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and stakeholders to address the impact of the pandemic on higher learning across all areas. As of the release of this 'White Paper' (March 2021), the devastating ripples continue to affect our students, faculty and staff, as well as our communities. This past year has been a learning experience for our HBCUs. Together, through the convening of the HBCU Action Nation, we provided valuable information, along with challenges, potential solutions, strategic needs, and urgencies facing HBCUs today; that will surely impact us for the next couple of years.

*"I called for a comprehensive approach to helping all our stakeholders of alumni, faculty, students, staff and community. We are not leaving anyone out, since COVID-19 hasn't left anyone out. Many people have lost their jobs or been furloughed because of the virus. Therefore, Tennessee State University wanted to share, at no cost, to our sister HBCUs, our partnership with Apple's 'Everyone Can Code and Create' to help retool or gain digital literacies and new technology STEAM skills so that our communities can get back into the workforce and be even more competitive." <https://www.tnstate.edu/hbcuc2/index.html>*



Tennessee State University (TSU) is a public and historically black land-grant university (HBCU) in Nashville, Tennessee. Founded in 1912, it is the only state-funded historically black university in Tennessee. It is a member-school of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund. Tennessee State University offers bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees. It is classified among "R2: Doctoral Universities – High research activity".



**Dr. Robbie Melton**

***Associate Vice President SMART Technology Innovations & Graduate Dean***

Recognizing the impact of COVID19 on our HBCUs and the mission critical need for us to come together during this pandemic, I had to join this 'Call to Action' to contribute everything possible to help support and share resources. The pandemic required an immediate transition to virtually teaching and learning across the world without adequate time for preparation and training. I was honored to accept the 'Call' to co-host this event, as well as help identify solutions and resources such as the HBCU Affordable Solutions (AL\$) Open Education Resources (OER) (<http://www.hbcuals.org>) created to provide free and affordable teaching and learning resources such as FREE eTextbooks, adaptable online courses, virtual labs, ePortfolios, webinars regarding the range of topics and disciplines for teaching online, free tools and software for virtual teaching, and online student support services through the educational partnership of MERLOT and funding by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

# **WELCOME FROM THE NATIONAL ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**



**Mr. Anthony Boger**  
*Vice President for Business Development*

Our team at the National Accrediting Commission for Diversity and Inclusion (NACDI) is most honored to be able to support this effort of producing an Online Learning Consortium (OLC) white paper on the topic of historically black colleges and universities. We commend the OLC for partnering with the HBCU community's production of a brilliant virtual Town Hall event last May with diverse discussions around the organic HBCU enterprise.

NACDI is a membership organization that strives to elevate and expand the global capacity of diversity, equity and inclusion. Our team is committed to supporting professional development and the evaluation of diversity and inclusion practices globally. Our work is directly aligned with the mission of HBCUs. Moreover, we recognize that upholding the work of HBCUs and the students they produce ensures more diverse workforces, workplaces and global communities.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**"Stronger Together"** is a publication of the Online Learning Consortium under the executive direction and leadership of Dr. Kim Cliett Long and Ms. Angela Gunder. The OLC would like to thank Dr. Lynette O'Keefe for her efforts curating the findings presented in this work from the HBCU Action Network Town Hall footage as a critical call to action for not only the HBCU community, but for all educators seeking diversity, equity and inclusion in the online, blended and digital learning environments. The OLC would also like to thank USDLA (and Drs. Reggie Smith, III and Arletha McSwain) and NACDI (and Mr. Anthony Boger) for their support of this publication as a resource and guide for the community's collective efforts to elevate the institutional strategy and vision of HBCUs across the country. Lastly, OLC would like to thank the many authors featured here in this work who offered extensions to impactful work happening in the HBCU community as well as concrete, actionable steps for educators, leaders and advocates to take in creating a more equitable future within education.

## ABOUT THE ONLINE LEARNING CONSORTIUM

The Online Learning Consortium (OLC) is a collaborative community of higher education leaders and innovators dedicated to advancing quality digital teaching and learning experiences designed to reach and engage the modern learner—anyone, anywhere, anytime. OLC inspires innovation and quality through an extensive set of resources, including best-practice publications, quality benchmarking, leading-edge instruction, community-driven conferences, practitioner-based and empirical research, and expert guidance. The growing OLC community includes faculty members, administrators, trainers, instructional designers, and other learning professionals, as well as educational institutions, professional societies, and corporate enterprises. Learn more at [onlinelearningconsortium.org](http://onlinelearningconsortium.org).

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On May 14th and 15th, 2020, the HBCU Action Nation Town Hall, co-hosted by United States Distance Learning Association, the Online Learning Consortium, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, and Tennessee State University, brought together many esteemed panels of experts that came together to share their stories, challenges, and solutions, holistically addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HBCU students, faculty and staff, institutions, and communities.

This two-day event provided an opportunity not just for those engaged with HBCUs to come together, but to gather information about the issues at the forefront of panelists' and participants' concerns, both for the immediate crisis and the upcoming challenges resulting from the pandemic. Panels throughout the event included:

- Impact of COVID-19 on HBCUs/New Revenue Opportunities
- Presidential Panel
- Accreditation and Regulatory Agencies
- Business Continuity and Economic Realities
- Emergency Pivot: Teaching, Learning, and Operations
- Enrollment Management/Marketing and PR

-  Facilities and Grounds
-  Community Economics/Mayors and Civic Leaders
-  High Quality Online Delivery Systems: Emergency Preparedness
-  Student Services/Athletics
-  HBCU Identity/Culture/Heritage
-  Best Practices in Digital and 21st Century Fundraising
-  Extra- and Co-Curricular Activities
-  Legislative and Policy
-  HBCUs and Broadband

Panelists included experienced and accomplished professionals and presidents from HBCUs, civic, community, and governmental leaders, business leaders, and representatives from philanthropic and accrediting organizations. Despite the significant breadth of topics and panelists, the event resulted in meaningful discussion and clear patterns of experiences and challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three primary themes emerged, under which several sub-themes and cross-considerations were identified: Student Support, Funding, and Operations.

## STUDENT SUPPORT

The 101 Historically Black Colleges and Universities were founded prior to 1964 for the purpose of providing educational opportunities to Black students, and received federal recognition and eligibility for funding under the Higher Education Act of 1965. Throughout their histories, HBCUs have served students in shifting contexts, providing education and training to free African Americans and emancipated slaves, offering options during segregation and the Civil Rights Era, and today, welcoming all, but continuing to serve predominantly Black students. A review of HBCU mission statements and accomplishments clearly shows that these institutions embody the core principles of higher education, with a strong focus on holistic support for their students. When considered in conjunction with the fact that HBCUs enroll disproportionately high numbers of underrepresented students, including low-income, first-generation, and academically underprepared individuals, it is no surprise that student support emerged as the top focus and concern of the HBCU Action Nation Town Hall.

Student support, particularly in the current environment of COVID-19 and social unrest, encompasses a broad swath of challenges and considerations at HBCUs. These areas range from students' physical and financial ability to attend, equitable access to technology, their mental and physical health, and the provision of the rich cultural and experiential opportunities at an HBCU.

## ABILITY TO ATTEND

Participants identified many concerns about students' ability to attend in the wake of the current higher education environment. Recruitment and enrollment are top challenges, both for domestic and international students. Many HBCUs rely on their international enrollments for a large percentage of revenue, and the inability to travel for both recruiters and students, as well as challenges with on-campus housing present challenges. One participant noted that the impact of international students' ability to attend was underdetermined, and "we have about 54 nations represented on our campus. So [during the pandemic] a lot of those students did not leave...being a principally residential campus, the big challenge becomes, how do we even think about social distancing in this kind of environment..."

Domestically, these challenges are also a concern; recruitment and housing overall, particularly for out-of-state students has resulted in new challenges, compounded by the impact of COVID-19 on standardized testing for admissions, on-campus housing changes, and shifts in students' needs related to employment and financial support. Additionally, supporting and retaining existing students is challenging for many of these same reasons. Many participants cited waivers for testing that will impact enrollment and recruitment for at least two years and noted that student support is key. One summed it up by saying "Recruiting students and recruiting the right students and providing them with services. We have to find a way that when this is over, the HBCUs have the intellectual capacity, the knowledge, to build out what they need to do and the resources to enable them to do that."

There was general consensus that the best opportunities to mitigate these challenges is to continually monitor and understand needs in the shifting environment, provide support and flexibility as much as possible, and consider new ways to serve both new and existing student populations.

Community partnerships and a shift to virtual support opportunities were primary examples, with one participant indicating that "When the pandemic hit, certain things we wanted to just make sure to [provide] to our students, to our high school counselors, to the pastors, to our network, to our community. We wanted to just make sure that they didn't feel as though they were disconnected from the university. So the first thing we did was took our opportunity and put in place a call campaign...we went through each of our stages and made sure that we did outreach to each of our students...the personal outreach and that personal touch, of course, allowed students to understand, number one, that we get what's happening, and number two, we're still here with you, and number three, that we're going to work with you through this process."

### Connections: Dr. Prudence LaBeach Pollard

*"The number of students receiving grades of D, F, W, and I in gateway courses is high among African American students and possibly for HBCUs. Policymakers and higher education practitioners are investigating the link between D, F, W, and I rates and low retention rates. Exploring D, F, W, and I rates can determine whether or not the gateway courses are in need of redesign to include Adaptive Learning Courseware that will supplement the curriculum in these courses and support student success."*

*Student performance in gateway courses is predictive of student success in the classroom and beyond. And especially important is the monitoring of low income, first-generation, and historically underrepresented students due to their low likelihood of academic success. Universities should therefore identify the gateway courses where students are unsuccessful and secondly implement a course redesign plan that supports teaching, learning, retention and completion.*

*Preliminary data obtained from an HBCU reveals that approximately 30% of the students earning grades D, F, W, or I, is higher for gateway courses than for all undergraduate courses at the institution. Universities must study the predictive nature of their gateway courses to navigate student success and determine whether performance in gateway courses has a direct link to student attrition and retention. It is anticipated that studies of student success could remove barriers and uniform the design and management of gateway courses, not only at HBCUs but at other universities with similar mission and scope."*

**Dr. Prudence LaBeach Pollard Vice President for Quality, Faculty Development and Research, Oakwood University**



## ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

The use of online options for instruction and many student services has been the go-to solution to the rapid changes necessitated by COVID-19 across the educational landscape. The panelists and participants indicated varying levels of ability to make such a quick shift, and accreditation agencies also responded with immediate allowances to better enable online instruction. In addition to these near-universal challenges, however, access to technology (devices and internet) for both faculty and students emerged as a challenge. Given that HBCUs enroll high volumes of disadvantaged students, this is of particular concern for them. One institution surveyed student technical capabilities and partnered for solutions:

"We had IBM and Red Hat donate laptops and some different things, and ones that we had with the IT division, and I actually managed an emergency assistance COVID-19 program for the university, and we were actually shipping laptops and paying for internet service for our students that may have had these challenges." Others also emphasized faculty access is a consideration as well, with one participant saying "I just approved a budget yesterday to buy about 110 laptops for faculty members. Because when we talk about students who don't have access, sometimes we forget that many of our faculty members, once they leave campus, don't have access."

### Connections: Dr. Trina Coleman

*"Students and faculty expect ubiquitous technology infrastructure on 21st century college and university campuses. Over the span of the last 25 years, technology has evolved from wired to wireless, from desktops to laptops and from mainframes to servers. Hosted applications and cloud services have replaced many, but not all, paper-driven data management processes.*

*The COVID-19 crisis exposed vulnerabilities at HBCUs when the abrupt shift was made to 100% online instruction. The immediate need was to ensure that all students and faculty had devices to deliver and receive information. From the administrative side, the cost associated with fulfilling this need does not have a budget line item. With the newness and expense of campus networks and online student services, many HBCUs do not have the financial means to have an annual budget line item for technology upgrades, hardware failures and software licensing fees. This needs to be a priority moving forward."*

**Dr. Trina L. Coleman CEO & President, Coleman Comprehensive Solutions**

## Connections: Dr. Roslyn Artis

*"The tremendous and often insurmountable barriers to the use of digital technologies to access online education presents myriad challenges for students of color. The same students who lacked access to broadband technology to complete school assignments, also lacked the ability to access telemedicine, virtual counseling and associated services. These students were disenfranchised and isolated from the college-sponsored services designed to support and assist them during their most challenging times. Accordingly, Benedict's commitment to social support for its students became a priority during Covid-19. Personal phone calls became a critical component of our communication protocols. Staff and faculty unselfishly shared their cellphone numbers and shirked the boundaries of the typical workday, in favor of round the clock accessibility to students in crisis."*

**Dr. Roslyn Artis**  
President, Benedict College

## STUDENT HEALTH

Student health considerations raised in the Town Hall focused on three areas: the mental and physical health of students related to COVID-19 and the effects it has had on their lives, the provision of a safe on-campus environment, and the provision of health resources.

Providing a safe and supportive environment related to students' mental and physical health is a top priority for institutions overall, but for HBCUs, it is of particular focus. There is increasing evidence that people of color are

disproportionately affected by COVID-19, due to inequities in healthcare as well as systemic challenges related to occupation, income, and housing (CDC, 2020). In addition to planning for social distancing, mask requirements, and other safety precautions, many participants indicated a shift to virtual services. "With regard to us transitioning to this virtual environment, many student health centers, many student counseling centers have had to pivot to either tele-health or this virtual model of being able to provide this physical well-being or mental health well-being for our students."

## Connections: Dr. Prudence LaBeach Pollard

*"As educational leaders we owe it to all, but particularly to our students and to our corner of the world, to teach and implement all we can in favor of good health, thus increasing the possibilities for optimal success in life among those who are our neighbors. [We must be] anchored on the belief that health is a human right, and that because the work of education requires health for learning, HBCUs must care for community well-being. Incorporating health initiatives and education into the campus curriculum and culture, students begin to understand how they are designed, and how to make choices to care for mind, body, and being, that honor the stewardship of the self that is their privilege to discharge."*

**Dr. Prudence LaBeach Pollard Vice President for Quality, Faculty Development and Research, Oakwood University**

## **Connections: Dr. Roslyn Artis**

*"Without question, the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on marginalized groups (e.g., individuals with low socioeconomic status, sexual and ethnic minorities, international students). Institutions like Benedict College recognized and embraced the need to double down on their commitment to these vulnerable populations in order to meet this challenging time."*

*In addition to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic for students, staff and faculty were traumatized as well. Many experienced members of their immediate family contracting the virus, and some even losing family members as a result. They experienced social isolation to the same extent as many of our students. They were thrust into the unfamiliar online environment and grieved the loss of in-person engagement with their students. Faculty wrestled with the uncertainties of this new modality while simultaneously home-schooling their own school-aged children or caring for elderly, at-risk parents. Some battled the darkness of depression and the fear of the unknown. Yet, despite their challenges, the faculty and staff located and tapped the reservoir of empathy to shower on their vulnerable students.*

*Social support is the lynchpin of promoting not merely mental health, but also physical wellness. By developing and maintaining a robust social support network, Benedict College prioritized everyone's emotional and physical well-being. Benedict staff and faculty took advantage of available digital technologies to virtually keep in touch with one another and, more importantly, with our students."*

**Dr. Roslyn Artis  
President, Benedict College**

## **Connections: Mrs. Barbara A. Perkins**

*"COVID-19 has brought a barrage of challenges to many people across the nation and the world since January 2020 especially at the nation's historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Of particular concern to me is the inescapable emotional and mental struggles of our Black students. Students are grappling with an uncertain future, not knowing how to successfully and confidently navigate through a new system of learning that does not address their specific needs, such as how to participate in the safety and well-being of their individual families.*

*Serious impediments to their well-being include: depression, fear, stress, anxiety, sadness and isolation. In addition to these major issues brought on due to this perfect storm of a pandemic with physical and social confinement, students are watching their family members dying at a disproportionate rate from the coronavirus, exposing the unjust and racial disparities in healthcare. This environment of death, hardship and the brutal killing of Black men and women has had the worst possible impact on our students. While the suicide rate for white students continues to be much higher than the suicide rate of Black students, the rate of suicide among Black students has doubled.*

*A solution is that we can not wait for our students to come to us for help. We must go to them. Faculty and staff members must be coached and trained on how to add a level of support to what they do on a day-to-day basis with students. A commitment to providing faculty and staff with extra tools to help support and identify the subtle cries for help is an essential investment in our HBCU students."*

**Mrs. Barbara A. Perkins  
President, International Black Women's Public Policy Institute Dorothy I. Height Global Leadership Academy**

## STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The unique experience of HBCU communities and how it is impacted by COVID-19 was a common theme throughout the event. A cornerstone of education at HBCUs is the rich, diverse, and supportive environment that is explicitly and actively focused on whole-person and community development. Participants affirmed the cultural value and experience of HBCUs in numerous examples, and one summed it up by saying "I dare say that identity, culture, and heritage make up the essence of HBCUs. You take that away and you just have another institution offering courses and providing degrees...education is more than just a collection of classes. So it is the totality of that experience."

The changes to the student experience necessitated by the pandemic have resulted in a number of innovative solutions that not only allows HBCUs to continue providing these important experiences, but that have the potential to result in continued innovations to propel the HBCU forward for long-term reach. Some examples include virtual signing days, community groups, and chapel services, and several participants indicated exploration of other virtual events to provide an authentic experience.

"I think we're going to have to use that technology in terms of what we've done and what we put together and build, let's say videos and different things that we've done to show students that these experiences normally are taking place. If we don't have any games, the marching band is not marching anywhere, of course it can't be live, but we've played games. We've performed, we've done those types of things to be able to see and get the feeling of what that experience is. One of the things we've started doing is there are certain programs of course, with the social distancing piece that we can't necessarily have an audience for, but we've had speakers and things along those lines, and sessions and programs that we've been able to live stream and give some of those experiences to our students." In addition to planning for social distancing, mask requirements, and other safety precautions, many participants indicated a shift to virtual services. "With regard to us transitioning to this virtual environment, many student health centers, many student counseling centers have had to pivot to either tele-health or this virtual model of being able to provide this physical well-being or mental health well-being for our students."

### Connections: Dr. Mel Foster

*"The COVID-19 pandemic compelled HBCUs to expedite a level of technological change which was scary and painful for some and welcomed by others. Now, we have to embrace those changes as the new normal and acknowledge the partnerships which are helping us to become this new enhanced community. The United Negro College Fund - Institute for Capacity Building was a tremendous help to us by leveraging its resources to provide a variety of online teaching instruction with a stipend to our faculty. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Frontier Set provided those HBCUs with ongoing institutional assessments, site visits, and a student success technology assessment conducted by the ADA Institute. Overall, each of these partners provided a safe space for us to talk about the obstacles which hold us back, and encouraged us to move forward, boldly."*

**Dr. Melvin Foster**

**Associate Provost for Academic Success, Morehouse College**

## **Call to Action: Dr. Leslie Pollard**

*"In the wake of George Floyd's unnecessary and senseless death, I was determined that the Oakwood community would continue to be a center of empowerment and witness to the lives and work of a generation of student standard bearers. Students who will, in the words of Jesus love "the least of these" (Mat. 25:40). I was more determined that the faith that had guided Oakwood University since 1896, and the cultural legacy handed to us as a Historically Black College and University, would continue to produce generations of Black attorneys, physicians, social workers, dentists, teachers, media and business professionals that combat the ills of our people perpetuated by systems of oppression.*

*Amid great turmoil we must remain focused on our continued intellectual and moral development. I am determined that "the least of these" would be able to financially access an Oakwood education, so that from the blood-soaked sod of the former slave plantation upon which our campus sits, a new generation of moral activists will be launched. Great thinkers will leave Oakwood's sacred grounds to not simply make money and acquire earthly assets, but to make a difference. Mr. Floyd, and all the Mr. Floyds of the past 400 years, deserve this commitment from our institution. Moral and intellectual passivity is not an option!*

*Finally, on behalf of the students at Oakwood University, be it resolved, that they are and will be the generation who will succeed. They will pick up the torch handed to them by the pioneers of civil justice, and we who lead and serve at Oakwood will facilitate their indispensable work and witness. This is their moment! During such a time as this especially in the throes of a global pandemic and civil unrest, our leadership will let no one tell our students that the work of 'standing for the right, though the heavens fall' is incompatible with the life of faith!"*

**Dr. Leslie N. Pollard President,  
Oakwood University**



## FUNDING

HBCUs make up approximately 3 percent of public and private higher education institutions in the United States, and graduate 17 percent of Black undergraduate students, particularly in STEM fields (ACE, 2019). However, they remain underfunded compared to primarily white institutions. The Thurgood Marshall College Fund reports that HBCU endowments are on average, one-eighth the size of other institutions, and ACE found in 2019 that HBCUs are not only more reliant on federal, state, and local funding, but experienced the highest reductions in such funding between 2003-2015. These figures indicate that not only did gaps exist prior to the current higher education environment, but that HBCUs are now facing an even more disproportionate challenge.

One panelist emphasized this point, stating that “there is no doubt that many HBCUs have been underfunded over the years. That has become truer and truer of every institution, however, especially our state institutions. When I worked in Virginia, I went in 1987, and the state was paying 70 percent of the cost of instruction. It’s now down to about 5 percent.”

Panelists and participants in the Town Hall focused on three primary sources of funding: legislative funding, partnerships, and fundraising.



## LEGISLATIVE FUNDING

A brief overview of current and/or potential legislative changes at the federal level was provided, including the White House Federal HBCU Initiative, legislation to increase federal funding for HBCUs, and funding for scholarships, research, and excellence at land-grant HBCUs. Some examples included the CARES Act, stimulus packages, and targeted programs. In addition, panelists encouraged HBCU leadership to be engaged with their elected leaders and representatives at federal, state, and local levels. Participants were encouraged to communicate about their successes, challenges, needs, and impact on their communities: "You need to be at the table, you need your needs to be heard and to be clearly heard and to be loudly heard. Whether it's hiring lobbyists, whether it is your president going and speaking to legislators, to legislative committees, to governors, you need the rest of the world to understand two things. Number one is what you need.

Number two is what you're going to do with it...I think one of the issues has been the needs of the HBCUs have often been drowned out by the legitimate efforts of others, but they are louder. They are better organized. This is a real opportunity to make some very real needs and very real opportunities known."

Beyond these items, most discussion centered on the HBCU Capital Finance Board and Opportunity Zones. The Opportunity Zone Program is a federal initiative that provides tax-based incentives to businesses and corporations for partnerships in opportunity zones, which include 8,764 communities identified as economically distressed and nominated by state governors. Over half of HBCUs are located in these zones, presenting potential opportunities for partnerships benefitting their students and communities.

### Connections: Representative Alma S. Adams

*"It's long past time we stopped resting on our laurels and take the fight for greater investment in our institutions to both our government and our corporate partners. As my congressional colleagues and I consider other major legislation, we should be seeking creative, bipartisan solutions and opportunities for our schools in each bill that comes through Congress. But government alone cannot be the sole answer. We must gain the buy-in and investment of private organizations and corporations to move HBCUs forward."*

**Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, United States House of Representatives  
From "Increasing Opportunities That Allow HBCUs to Thrive"<sup>2</sup>**

2. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/oped-increasing-opportunities-allow-hbcus-thrive-n801876>

## PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships to support HBCU institutions, students, and communities were discussed at length among presenters and participants. In the context of funding, these discussions focused on government partnerships at federal, state, and local levels, as well as on public-private partnerships. Government partnership development and opportunities include not only remaining in communication and engagement, but also discovery and participation in competitive funding opportunities and leveraging existing programs and resources in support of HBCU goals. Public-private partnerships, such as those included in the Opportunity Zone program, offer the opportunity for HBCUs to partner with business and enterprise operations to support student success through funding, mutually-beneficial initiatives driving quality curricula and workforce skills, and job and/or internship opportunities for students. Grant opportunities are also available for a number of challenges, including student support, research, and institutional preservation.

Additionally, partnerships with other higher education institutions offer opportunities to support students both academically and socially. There were many examples of independent partnerships to provide courses, services, and internships, and one example included consortia agreements. “I do think we’re going to have to work together to find consortia arrangements, help foster consortia arrangements, and I think when schools work together to create these online consortia, you will be able to offer more opportunities to all of your students, which means you will have an expanded opportunity to serve students. And those students who are one semester or one year away will have an opportunity to complete, and I would encourage you, as you build this capacity to serve students who are not on your campus, to reach out...because you can now accommodate them in a way that maybe you couldn’t before, and they are now part of a learning community that they might not have otherwise felt part of.”

### Connections: Mr. Edward Jones

*“The HBCU Action Nation convening is a reminder that no institution that primarily serves Black people – new or legacy; large or small – is exempt from the threat of extinction. Before COVID-19, Black lives and institutions were under persistent threat. Yet, we continue to fight. COVID-19 is just the latest opponent, which seeks to disproportionately erase us. The virus has lifted the cover off of the inequities that we know – and that too many have denied. This gathering is a reminder that our battles aren’t singular, and our warriors are many. We have to keep reminding one another that we must mobilize together and get all hands on deck. Our arsenal is vast, so we must continue to leverage all our assets and commit to stay in the fight. We must get – or stay – in the ring, because I believe that we have all that we need to win.”*

**Edward Jones, Vice President of Programming for ABFE – A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities<sup>3</sup>**

3. <https://www.abfe.org/>

## **Connections: Ms. Jeanne Frazier**

*"As we look at the ways HBCUs can create needed diverse streams of income, one of the more in demand areas is educational services to active-duty military students and their families using the Voluntary Education Program (VEP) through the Department of Defense (DOD). At Military Learners Now, we facilitate active and reserve duty service members and their dependents earning college degrees at participating minority serving institutions (MSIs) or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The required pivot to online learning that became urgently necessary due to the global pandemic may have had an unintended positive consequence. HBCUs are now more poised and ready to take advantage of innovations and expansions to new populations such as the active-duty service member ecosystem."*

**Jeanne Frazier  
President, Military Learners Now**

## FUNDRAISING

Fundraising, donor relations, and alumni giving emerged as both an opportunity and a challenge resulting from COVID-19. Opportunities include engaging both new and existing audiences through innovative digital solutions, and leveraging those solutions to enhance fundraising efforts. Challenges include maintaining the rich community and traditional sources of engagement (such as church, college sports, and events such as homecoming) in a largely digital environment.

Participants were encouraged to continue their fundraising efforts: "I want to share with you a recent survey that came back from Fidelity Charitable. Fifty-four percent of donors said that they plan to continue to give. Twenty-five percent of donors said they will increase their giving.

Overwhelmingly, donors state that they do not intend to abandon organizations that they are passionate about...what we're hearing is yes, people are concerned, yes, they're struggling with how do they do it, but the answer is you have to do it.

You have to keep asking. Right now is the time to be focusing on how do I cultivate my donors? How do I cultivate my alumni? How do I make sure I keep them relevant?"

Panelists and participants provided examples such as text-donation and social media campaigns, as well as virtual communities and events that encourage giving and support for HBCU institutions and students. Regardless of the event type, grassroots fundraising approaches include "Consciously communicating specific messages. Driving people to specific platforms. Collecting information. Following up with people based on what they can learn about those who are giving online. And ensuring they're building for a sustainable fundraising and interaction that will follow this unique point in time."

### Connections: Ms. Christal Cherry

*"There was dialogue about the importance of collaborating and partnering with businesses in surrounding communities to make sure the interests and future challenges of HBCUs are being addressed. Last, the panel discussed the importance of staying active in the philanthropic community by reaching out to funders to provide updates and sharing how dollars raised will be used to support our missions. This was stimulating and enlightening dialogue about ways our HBCUs can emerge stronger and viable in a new normal. We realized that this crisis provides an opportunity for us to forge a better reality for all of us, particularly our HBCUs."*

**Christal Cherry, Executive Consultant at Bridge Philanthropic Consulting and The Board Pro<sup>4</sup>**

4. <https://bridgephilanthropicconsulting.com/>

## Connections: Dr. Glenda Glover

*"As an HBCU graduate and someone who has dedicated my life's work to the HBCU community, I personally know the impact that establishing an endowment has on a student's enrollment and graduation prospects". Dr. Glover explained that endowments sustain universities by enabling them to offer scholarships to the best and brightest students. Last September, she called the members of her illustrious sisterhood to task. Her goal was to raise \$10 million for HBCUs so that initial endowments could be established at those schools with the greatest need.*

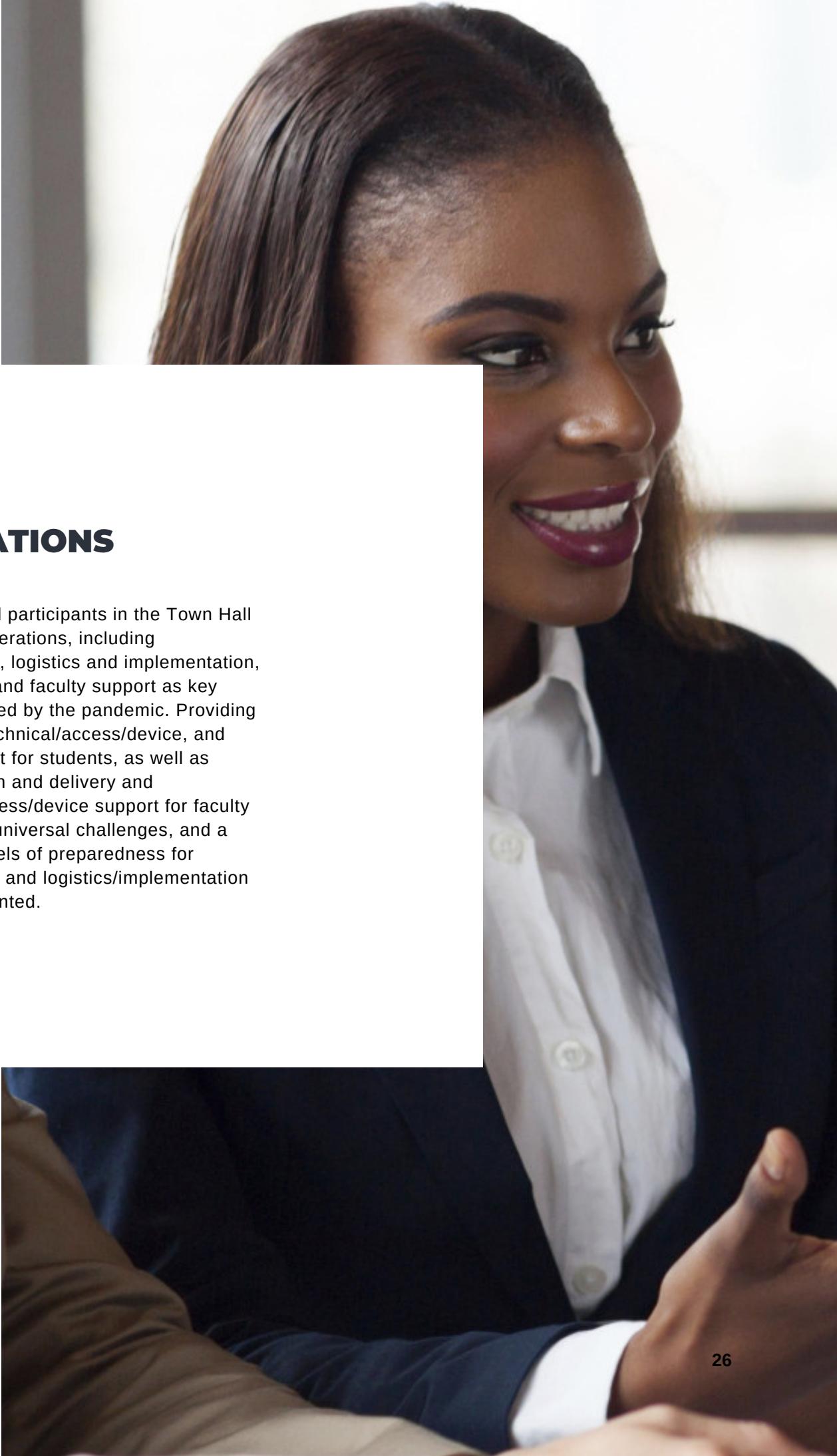
**Dr. Glenda Gover, President of Tennessee State University**  
From "Dr. Glenda Glover Unifies HBCUs Through Service and Leadership" by Keka Araujo<sup>5</sup>

## Call to Action: Dr. Carl S. Pettis

*"HBCUs must seize the moment. For far too long the narrative has been that many HBCU responses to RFPs at various levels are not 'strong enough' or HBCUs do not reach out to other institutions or entities in the community and region to form collaborative agreements. While there may still be room for improvement, I do not subscribe to the simple logic in the previous sentence as reasoning for the lack of robust partnerships and the disproportionate funding for HBCUs at the state, regional and/or national level. Yes, HBCUs need to be able to clearly articulate their capabilities and capacity for executing and delivering on an investment of time or money in the case of a partnership or funding award, but potential partners and funding agencies must also not cast aside the fact that they need HBCUs if they are to make the impact that they 'propose' to make. A proposal is a two-way street. This is truly a case where we can all do more together. The "reach" must come through dedicated efforts to change the narrative if we are to reach our intended goals to impact students and our HBCU communities."*

**Dr. Carl S. Pettis, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Alabama State University**

5. <https://www.diversityinc.com/dr-glenda-glover-unifies-hbcus-through-service-and-leadership/>



## OPERATIONS

Panelists and participants in the Town Hall discussed operations, including infrastructure, logistics and implementation, and student and faculty support as key areas impacted by the pandemic. Providing academic, technical/access/device, and social support for students, as well as course design and delivery and technical/access/device support for faculty emerged as universal challenges, and a variety of levels of preparedness for infrastructure and logistics/implementation were represented.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

With regard to infrastructure, some institutions indicated strong technology and online education prior to COVID-19, and those reported fewer challenges with the infrastructure and technology impact of remote instruction. Others indicated that their infrastructure prior to the pandemic was not sufficient to support the needs of fully-remote instruction and services. These institutions called upon their administrators, staff, and faculty to quickly put together plans and ensure academic continuity, and some partnered with other institutions or corporations to support their students and needs.

Following the initial impact in Spring 2020, the focus of all institutions shifted to logistics and implementation of future planning amid the uncertainty of the pandemic. Some actions include large-scale implementation of LMS and technology to increase quality learning opportunities and capacity, and there was an overall spirit of broad opportunity in these discussions. “I think it’s a real opportunity to think differently. We’re thinking about how to offer everything from packaging and disbursing financial aid, to career services support. It requires a different paradigm of thinking.

I think someone talked about mindset earlier, and really thinking about a different mindset, and planning to look at all the challenges and barriers that are coming in now, our students that are now virtual...I think that's an approach that's going to be really critical.” In addition to expanded virtual opportunities, the constraints and challenges resulting from COVID-19 have many institutions examining their academic calendars and catalog of course and program offerings for potential revision and/or reduction. Throughout these considerations, academic quality must be maintained, as noted on the topic of accreditation, but echoed throughout: “Our concern is, and always has been, and always will be, the quality of instruction and services that are provided to students. In spite of the pandemic, that requirement is still there.”

### Connections: Dr. Anthony L. Holloman

*“What do these findings above tell us about the challenges at HBCUs currently? The COVID Pandemic forced HBCUs to address the longstanding challenges of a myopic infrastructure. Tuition driven institutions faced the risk of closure as a result of an inability to deliver face to face instruction. Asynchronous platforms allowing students to have the classroom experience while learning in a virtual environment have become the mandate. The use of technology has forever changed the way HBCUs educate their student populations as the one size fits all model has been debunked.”*

**Dr. Anthony L. Holloman, Vice President of Advancement, Director of Athletics, and Executive Director, Fort Valley State University Foundation**

## SUPPORT

Support, as related to operations, includes consideration of student and staff needs, as well as technical, training, and academic support. Student and staff needs regarding health and safety are a top concern, and a mix of remote instruction/work and safety precautions on campus are employed to address these issues.

In addition to device and internet access as discussed above, several panelists and participants underscored the need for technical support such as help desks and processes, training on educational technology for both students and faculty, and academic support and resources.

### Connections: Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack

*"In spite of the pandemic, Claflin University achieved a 9.3 percent enrollment increase in our Fall 2020 freshman class. Our scholars have persevered despite numerous COVID-related disruptions. HBCUs are not only surviving during this pandemic but we are also thriving. The financial resources we received from the CARES Act allowed us to comply with COVID-19 protocols and guidance which included COVID-19 tests, personal protective equipment (PPE) kits, and safety precaution signage. The University also received funds from alumni and supporters to purchase laptops and hotspots to increase internet access for students residing in rural areas."*

**Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack**  
President, Claflin University

### Connections: Dr. Roslyn Artis

*"A collective effort to establish a strong support network was urgently needed to address the myriad economic, academic, physical, social, and emotional challenges created and/or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The College embraced issues of inequality and disparity to help staff and faculty better connect with marginalized populations. The practice of 'intentional empathy' was urged as a framework for all student interactions. We show empathy by understanding others' experiences from their perspectives and recognizing emotions in them. English Professor Cris Beam studies empathy and wrote a book called, *I Feel You: The Surprising Power of Extreme Empathy*.<sup>6</sup> She notes that there are many definitions of empathy. Some of the earliest, and simplest ones, characterize empathy as the ability to "stand in another's shoes." Brené Brown<sup>7</sup>, who has recently popularized empathy, defines it as 'feeling with people'; and notes that it's a 'vulnerable choice' because it requires a person to tap into something personal that identifies with the struggle of another. In short, empathy is a framework for how we view others, and, to some extent, how we view ourselves."*

**Dr. Roslyn Artis**  
President, Benedict College

6. <http://www.crisbeam.com/i-feel-you>

7. <https://brenebrown.com/about/>

8. <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/47502/empathy-is-tough-to-teach-but-is-one-of-the-most-important-life-less-ons>

## **Call to Action: Dr. Robbie K. Melton**

*"HBCUs must move strategically and aggressively to empower our students, faculty, and communities with the required digital literacies and technological skills to be 'readied' competitors for the global connected workplace. The overall recommendations by the presenters advocate for stakeholders of HBCUs to take action politically to address inequalities, diversity, and inclusion issues. Further, the town hall concluded in a call for an united effort for HBCUs to collaborate in formulating legislation and funding to sustain the rich heritage, core value, and contributions of HBCUs. Not to overlook the call for partnerships with business and organizations to help integrate and implement diversity across all levels. Most importantly, was the dire call for acknowledging the 'talent pool' of our black and brown students that require support and mentorship. As the saying goes, 'HBCUs do not compete against each other; they complete each other!'"*

**Dr. Robbie K. Melton**

**Graduate Dean, P.I. HBCU C2 Everyone Can Code, Tennessee State University**



## CONCLUDING CALL TO ACTION

**Dr. Orlando L. Taylor**

Distinguished Senior Advisor to the President Executive Director, Center for the Advancement of STEM Leadership Chair, Board of Directors, Council for Higher Education Accreditation  
Distinguished Fellow, Association of American Colleges & Universities Professor and Dean  
Emeritus, Howard University Fielding Graduate University

### WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR HBCUS?

Traditional arguments for supporting the work and significance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are typically couched within a rather missionaristic model which suggests that society should “help” these institutions because of their commitment to educating arguably the nation’s largest, historically marginalized group in the United States – African Americans. These arguments often touch the heartstrings and purse strings of some of the nation’s most liberal and financially able individuals and foundations. To be sure, this assistance is needed and greatly appreciated by the receiving institutions and the students that they serve.

It is high time, however, for the narrative to change. It is certainly true that HBCUs have provided lifelines, bootstraps, and the wherewithal for many African Americans to fulfill their destinies and dreams to advance beyond the margins of inclusion in American society. But, this narrative is far too narrow. In fact, HBCUs play an essential role in advancing the entire nation’s capacity for global leadership – not just the African American community!

To put the HBCU story into perspective, it is critical to examine the rapidly changing demographics of the United States and the enrollment trends in its colleges and universities. Today, African Americans and other people of color comprise upwards of 35 % of all U.S. citizens and permanent residents in American colleges and universities – and the number is growing. A few years ago, the Pew Research Center suggested that in a few decades, students of color will make up the majority

of students in the nation's higher education institutions. In the STEM disciplines, foreign nationals currently comprise upwards of 50% in some critical STEM fields, yet increasingly many are staying in their home countries for STEM higher education, or pursuing such studies in Europe, Canada, or Australia. And yet, underrepresentation of Black and Brown students persists in the STEM fields in US colleges and universities despite their rapidly rising numbers in the general student population. Because of these changing realities, it has become obvious to some that the United States will be unable to retain its global leadership in STEM unless it makes significant improvements in its recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation of African American (and LatinX) students in the immediate future and the decades ahead. If one accepts this argument, then the track record of HBCUs must be considered a national priority, rather than a missionaristic one. The numbers tell the story! Despite their total enrollment of about 9% of all African American students currently enrolled in 4-year U.S. colleges and universities, HBCUs graduate more than 13% of such students, and 7 of the top 10 producers of African American undergraduates who later earn doctoral degrees in Science and Engineering are HBCUs. In short, these data suggest that HBUs are a national treasure inasmuch as they help the United States retain its global competitiveness, especially in STEM. This is clearly far from the missionaristic model referenced above.

Tennessee State University and its partners led the HBCU ACTION NATION virtual conference in May 2020. Proceedings from the conference are summarized in this report which provides an important framework for enhancing access and capacity for HBCUs to do even more in contributing talent for the nation's STEM enterprise. Some HBCUs have already become important players in producing cutting edge research and in producing undergraduate, master's and PhD degree recipients – especially African Americans - for the nation's STEM workforce. Howard University, for example, continues to be the nation's largest on-campus producer of African Americans who earn PhDs in STEM and North Carolina A & T State University leads the national HBCU community in obtaining NSF funds to support faculty and student research opportunities in many critical science and engineering fields such as cybersecurity, nanoscience, nanoengineering and bioenergy. Tennessee State University, a Carnegie R2: High Research Activity University, conducts cutting-edge research in such fields as biotechnology, nanomaterials and astrophysics. With enhanced technology infrastructure and human resource capacity, HBCUs can expand their reputation as national treasures!

And this capacity is not limited to African Americans. HBCUs continue to graduate significant numbers of LatinX and other race students. For example, Huston-Tillotson University in Texas is approaching a 25% enrollment of LatinX students that will qualify it as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), as well as an HBCU. At the University of the District of Columbia only 65% of its students are African Americans, while HBCU Bluefield State University is 90%White! These examples provide further evidence that HBCUs are an essential national resource for producing people of diverse races, ethnicities and genders for the betterment of our nation and its global leadership capacity! Indeed national treasures for ALL Americans to celebrate!

Finally, many HBCUs are well on the way to providing significant higher education opportunities in the online environment. With the onset of Covid-19, these institutions, like most others in the country, have ramped up their capacity to offer didactic and laboratory courses in online environments. Some HBCU institutions are offering more certificate and degree programs online such as Tennessee State University through TSU Online. This trend is likely to continue and possibly expand after the pandemic subsides for fully online and hybrid certificate and degree offerings. Through the acquisition of upgraded technology and software resources, along with intensified faculty development, the opportunities are endless for the HBCU community.

***The future of HBCUs is clearly NOW!!***

# **ENDNOTES**

## **PRESS RELEASE: TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY TO CO-HOST HBCU ACTION NATION'S VIRTUAL TOWN HALL**

### **Call to Action Aimed at Preserving Historically Black Colleges & Universities Through COVID-19**

Nashville – Dr. Glenda Glover, President of Tennessee State University, today announced the institution will co-host a virtual Town Hall to kick off a collaborative grassroots call to action started by HBCU Action NATION to devise an action plan to assist the nation's historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The virtual event will take place on May 14, and 15, 2020, and discuss solutions to address the challenges faced by HBCUs as a direct result of the current pandemic.

"Tennessee State University is proud to co-host a virtual Town Hall on such a critical topic," says Glover. "While the pandemic has affected all institutions of higher learning, the impact has been felt much more strongly by HBCUs. Our schools do a wonderful job supporting students, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. Cutting the semester short and sending students home to learn online has presented a set of challenges many schools were simply not prepared to address. If even one of our colleges and universities fails, the ripples will be felt not only by the students, faculty and staff, but also by the community, partners, and businesses – support is a two-way street. We hope you will join us for this all-important discussion." Other event co-hosts include Dr. Robbie Melton, HBCU C2; Dr. Reggie Smith, III, Executive Director/CEO, United States Distance Learning Association; Dr. Kim Cliett Long, Board and External Affairs Committee Member, Online Learning Consortium; Mrs. Virginia Harris, National President, National Coalition of 100 Black Women; and, Dr. Arletha McSwain, Chair USDLA Certification Committee, Bethune Cookman University.

"Most HBCUs did not have the structure in place to immediately implement a fully online learning environment," adds Dr. Smith. "The past few months have been a learning experience for the university administrators, faculty and staff with whom I have spoken. There are still so many unresolved issues to be addressed. This Town Hall should provide valuable information, along with potential solutions, for the most important topics facing HBCUs today." Expert panels are planned on topics key to the overall strategic needs and urgencies of HBCUs now and moving forward. The clarion call and important virtual event is free; however, registration is required as the number of seats is limited.

The virtual Town Hall is a call to action from among a comprehensive group of interested parties, national and local organizations, and influencers. More information about the event and a link to register can be found at [www.HBCUActionNATION.com](http://www.HBCUActionNATION.com). Event sponsors include: Denny's, Inc., Wiliam and Flora Hewlett Foundation, vitalink, Bethune Cookman College, HBCUgrow, Military Learners Now, Dunn LLC, Lowcountry Rice Culture Project, Jonathan Green Living Collection, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, International African American Museum, Online Learning Consortium, and United States Distance Learning Association.

## **ABOUT THE PAINTING**

Famed international Gullah artist, Jonathan Green, has allowed the use of his iconic painting titled, "A Breath of Freedom." This artwork was commissioned for the federal courthouse in Charleston, South Carolina to commemorate precedent setting civil rights cases presided over by Judge Julius Waties Waring, a United States District Judge for the Eastern District of South Carolina. Judge Waring played an important role in the early legal battles of the American Civil Rights Movement. In 1951, Waring was one of three judges to hear the school desegregation test case known as *Briggs v. Elliott*. Thurgood Marshall represented the plaintiffs against the Clarendon County, South Carolina public schools which were described as separate but not at all equal. The plaintiffs lost the case before the three-judge panel which voted 2-1 for the defendants.

Waring's eloquent dissent, and his phrase, "Segregation is per se inequality," formed the legal foundation for the United States Supreme Court in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Fine art posters of "A Breath of Freedom" now hang in high schools and federal judge's chambers across the United States. The significance of this particular artwork to this Town Hall event reminds us that at no other time in history has an event such as this pandemic had such a catastrophic effect on the well-being of our nation's HBCUs. It is a reminder that stakeholders must come together with urgency, just as they did during the Civil Rights Movement.

**For more information:**  
**Corliss Pauling, vitalink®**  
**[corliss@vitalinkweb.com](mailto:corliss@vitalinkweb.com)**  
**919.850.0605**

# HBCU Action NATION

EASTERN STANDARD TIME

Thursday  
May 14,  
2020

|             | Panel Sessions                                        | Panelists                                                                                                                                                                                        | Panel Descriptions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7:30-7:55   | Keynote Address:<br>Call to Action                    | Oakwood University Aeolians—<br>“We Shall Overcome”<br><br>Dr. Xernona Clayton, Civil Rights Leader and Founder of The Trumpet Awards; President and CEO of the Trumpet Awards Foundation        | Perspective of the history and legacy of HBCUs from founding thru the Civil Rights era to the present.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 8:00-8:55   | Impact of COVID-19 on HBCUs/New Revenue Opportunities | Mr. Johnathan Holifield, White House Initiative on HBCUs;                                                                                                                                        | The pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 has been devastating to the global economy. The effect on HBCUs is a watershed event that might prove to be terminal in some cases. What are approaches HBCUs can employ to enhance CARES Act assistance, with additional revenue generation? |
| 9:00-9:55   | Presidential Panel                                    | Dr. Glenda Glover, Tennessee State University;<br><br>Dr. Perry Ward, Lawson State Community College;<br><br>Dr. Leslie Pollard, Oakwood University;<br><br>Dr. Carmen Walters; Tougaloo College | The presidents of HBCUs are on the front lines daily. They must oversee the total enterprise. What are some of the most immediate effects of COVID-19 on institutions? What are some predicted long term effects?                                                               |
| 10:00-10:55 | Accreditation and Regulatory Agencies                 | Dr. Belle Wheelan, President, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges                                                                                                | Higher Ed institutions are heavily regulated and are governed by accrediting standards. How has the disruption caused by COVID-19 affected accreditation and regulatory matters across the institution? How will the necessary assessments change to reflect the new norm?      |

# HBCU Action NATION

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| 11:00-11:25 | Business Continuity and Economic Realities.        | Mrs. Virginia Harris, National President, National Council of 100 Black Women;<br><br>Dr. Orlando Taylor, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Research at Fielding Graduate University                                                                       | As emergency closures became eminent, institutions scrambled to ensure teaching and learning would be able to continue. But what about business continuity considerations and managing the remote enterprise and workforce. What are some of the considerations that must be made? What are best practices and policies?                |
| 11:30-12:30 | Emergency Pivot: Teaching, Learning and Operations | Dr. Carl Pettis, Provost, Alabama State University;<br><br>Dr. Cristi Ford, V.P., Training, NeighborWorks America<br><br>Dr. Olivia Beverly, Asst. VP, Research and Faculty; Director, Quality Enhancement Plan; Coordinator, Faculty Development, Oakwood University | The emergency pivot to remote teaching, learning and operations revealed gaps in emergency preparedness. What lessons were learned during this watershed event? What are some of the steps that can be taken to prepare for events of this nature?                                                                                      |
| BREAK       |                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 1:30-2:25   | Enrollment Management/Marketing and PR             | Dr. David Richardson,Jr.; Oakwood University<br><br>Mr. Anthony Brooks, Chief Enrollment Officer, Shaw University                                                                                                                                                     | With the academic year disrupted, the normal cycles of the enrollment management process will need to be revamped. What are some of the ways institutions are coping? What are some best practices that institutions can deploy using technology to replicate these functions?                                                          |
| 2:30-3:25   | Facilities and Grounds                             | Mr. Anthony Holloman, Vice President of Advancement, Director of Athletics, and Executive Director, Fort Valley State University Foundation<br><br>Rev. James A. Boger, Associate Director of New Ministries, California/Pacific Conference, United Methodist Church  | Billions of dollars are invested in the physical plant of HBCU campuses are sitting dormant during the COVID-19 closures. Upkeep and maintenance is a concern especially since many campuses have aging, even historic facilities. What are the effects of the shutdown on facilities? Costs to maintain dormant buildings and grounds? |

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|                                                |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>How will a prolonged shutdown affect the financial picture of the institutions?</b>                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Day 2,<br/>Friday,<br/>May 15,<br/>2020</b> |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 7:30-<br>7:55                                  | Keynote Address                                              | Mr. John Miller, C.E.O., Denny's Inc.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>What is the role of HBCUs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the key to survival?</b>                                                                                                                                                         |
| 8:00-<br>8:25                                  | Community Economics/Mayors and Civic Leaders                 | <p>Mr. Tony Haygood; Mayor, Tuskegee, Alabama</p> <p>Mayor McKinley Price, National President, African American Mayors Association</p> <p>The Honorable Calvin Smyre, Georgia State Representative; Chair, Fort Valley State University Foundation Board; Board Trustee, Morehouse School of Medicine</p> <p>Mr. Thomas Dortch, National President, National President, 100 Black Men of America</p> | HBCUs have tremendous economic impact in the communities where they are located and beyond. How will communities be affected if some HBCUs do not thrive or survive?                                                                             |
| 9:00-<br>9:55                                  | High Quality Online Delivery Systems: Emergency Preparedness | <p>Mrs. Angela Gunder; Online Learning Consortium;</p> <p>Dr. Robbie Melton, HBCU C2/Affordable Learning Solutions OER</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | The emergency pivot to online instruction did not allow enough time in most cases to consider quality or best practices. What can be done now to ensure that high-quality practices are deployed in online courses to safeguard student success? |
| 10:00-<br>10:55                                | Student Services/Athletics                                   | Mrs. Barbara Perkins, President, International Black Women's Public Policy Institute                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | The provision of adequate student services is an accreditation requirement. What are some of the                                                                                                                                                 |

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|             |                                                                    | <p><b>Dr. Teresa McKinney, V.P. Student Services, Texas Southern University</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Melvin Foster, Associate Provost for Student Success, Morehouse College</b></p>                                                                                                            | ways institutions can confirm compliance within a virtual environment?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 11:00-11:25 | HBCU Identity/Culture/Heritage                                     | <p><b>Dr. Kimberly Jeffries Leonard, National President, The Links, Incorporated</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Charlie Nelms, Higher education leader, author, speaker, and activist</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Leonard Haynes, Senior Advisor, Strategic Education, Inc.</b></p>                             | HBCUs are steeped with a long and storied traditions, legacies and history. They provide an unforgettable setting for cultural identification and heritage that empowers their graduates throughout their lives. How will HBCUs be able to replicate these mission critical traditions in the virtual world?                                |
| 11:30-12:30 | Best Practices in Digital and 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Fundraising | <p><b>Mr. Edward Jones, Vice President, Programs, A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities;</b></p> <p><b>Mr. Dwayne Ashley, Founder and Chief Executive, The BPC Fund</b></p> <p><b>Mel and Pearl Shaw, Saad and Shaw Comprehensive Fund Development Services</b></p>          | With the disruption in typical higher ed. operations, how to use technology effectively in fundraising is a major consideration. What are some of the best practices for cultivating and securing donors and donations using technological tools in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century?                                                           |
| BREAK       |                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 1:30-2:25   | Extra- and Co-Curricular Activities                                | <p><b>Dr. Elfred Anthony Pinkard, President, Wilberforce University (workforce initiatives)</b></p> <p><b>Mr. Ron Thomas, R.S. Thomas and Associates Training</b></p> <p><b>Dr. David Staten, HBCU Times</b></p> <p><b>Mr. Anthony G. Stepney, PGA Player Development, Executive</b></p> | Beyond the classroom, extracurricular and co-curricular activities are essential components of campus life. How will institutions deliver these mainstays remotely? What will institutions do to manage workforce initiatives and ensure other critical outcomes for students in other modalities? How will institutions help students feel |

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|           |                           | Director of APEX Development Partners                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | connected, engaged and productive using technology?                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| 2:30-3:25 | Legislative and Policy    | <p>Under Secretary Diane Auer-Jones, United States Department of Education</p> <p>Dr. Michael T. Nettles, Senior Vice President and the Edmund W. Gordon Chair of Policy Evaluation and Research, ETS</p> <p>Mr. Mike Goldstein, Senior Counsel, Cooley, LLP</p>                                                                                                                                              | HBCUs are dependent on essential funding from public sources especially federal financial aid, Title III, grant and programs. How do current educational policies affect HBCUs? What does the changing legislative landscape as a result of COVID-19 mean for HBCUs? |
| 3:30-4:25 | HBCUs and Broadband       | <p>Dr. Francine Alkisswani, Minority Broadband Initiative National Telecommunications and Information Administrations, U.S. Dept. of Commerce</p> <p>Mr. Greg Clinton, Co-founder, the Virtual Justice Project; North Carolina Central University;</p> <p>Dr. Trina Coleman, CEO and President of Coleman Comprehensive Solutions, LLC</p> <p>Dr. James Clark, President, South Carolina State University</p> | HBCUs have historically had challenges with their technological infrastructure. Many have aging hardware and because of underfunding technology is a constant competing priority. How do HBCUs move from survival to recovery to sustainability?                     |
| 4:25-5:00 | Next Steps/Call to Action |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |



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